

Alzheimer's Disease



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Dear Friend,

Of the nearly six million people affected by Alzheimer's in the United States, approximately 588,000 live in California. That accounts for about one-tenth of the nation's Alzheimer's patients, a number that is expected to double over the next 20 years. It is estimated that nearly 1.1 million Californians are caregivers for Alzheimer's patients and of those caregivers seventy five percent are family members. Alzheimer's is now the sixth leading cause of death in California.

In response to the expected increase in Alzheimer's patients in California, under the guidance of California's Alzheimer's Disease and Related Disorders Advisory Committee, and in collaboration with both public and private organizations, state leaders developed *California's State Plan for Alzheimer's Disease: An Action Plan for 2011-2021*. The goal of the plan is to implement and administer programs that provide services to persons with Alzheimer's disease and their families.

One such program recently established through legislation is the "Silver Alert" notification system (SB 1047). The Silver Alert is an emergency system modeled after the Amber Alert, in which law enforcement can broadcast regional or statewide alerts for seniors and/or other adults with Alzheimer's or other cognitive disorders who have been reported missing. The new system is a valuable tool for law enforcement officials in protecting and providing security for seniors.

It is my hope and that of my colleagues that through research like that conducted by the Alzheimer's Association, the University of California and all those involved, we will see the day when families are able to delay if not halt the debilitating symptoms of Alzheimer's.

Sincerely,

Senator Fran Pavley
Senate District 27

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What is Alzheimer's Disease?

Alzheimer's disease is an illness of the brain that causes large numbers of nerve cells to die. This process adversely affects a person's memory and ability to learn, reason, make judgments, communicate, and carry out daily activities such as bathing and eating.

Symptoms of Alzheimer's Disease

Can't remember where you put your keys or the name of an acquaintance? Those momentary lapses are normal; memory loss that disrupts daily life is not a normal part of aging. And, even though many individuals may experience one or more of the following symptoms, it does not necessarily mean the symptom is due to Alzheimer's disease or a related dementia. If you are concerned, it is important to seek an evaluation by a physician or one of the Alzheimer's Disease Centers noted in the *Resources* section to receive a determination. Possible symptoms include:

- Gradual and progressive memory loss;
- Difficulty in following directions and performing routine tasks;
- Impaired judgment, reasoning, concentration, and orientation;
- Confusion and restlessness;
- Personality changes;
- Loss of ability to care for one's self.

Importance of Early Diagnosis

Doctors do not know what causes Alzheimer's disease, but they do know that early diagnosis and treatment can help preserve function for months to years. Seeing your doctor early means you can find out what may be causing your forgetfulness; it may not be Alzheimer's. It also provides greater opportunity to get involved in Alzheimer's disease clinical trials. To find out more about these trials, talk with your health care provider or contact the National Institute on Aging noted in the *Resources* section. Early diagnosis can help patients and families:

- Plan for the future;
- Make living arrangements;
- Take care of financial and legal matters;
- Develop support networks.

Risk Factors and Ways to Improve Your Lifestyle

Although no treatments or drugs have yet been approved that prevent or delay Alzheimer's disease, people can take some actions that are beneficial for healthy aging and that also might reduce the effects of possible risk factors for Alzheimer's disease and for other diseases as well. For example, you can:

- Exercise regularly;
- Eat a healthy diet that is rich in fruits and vegetables;
- Engage in social and intellectually-stimulating activities;
- Control type 2 diabetes;
- Lower high blood pressure levels;
- Lower high blood cholesterol levels;
- Maintain a healthy weight.

